

draw her rent from Greenwood, but only on condition that that arrangement could afterwards be put an end to. For this reason: The petitioner's rights in that reserve are challenged. A portion of her interest comes from a will. Wills have been decided by the Supreme Court to be invalid as far as they may purport to pass interests in West Coast Reserves. If that will is successfully challenged the office will be in this position: it will have to make good to the Natives some of those rents that Mrs. Brown has been drawing for some years. The other Natives who are interested will say, "Why did you allow her to lease part of this ground and draw rents from it when her interest in the ground was much less than represented by the rents? We look to you to return those rents." And the office will have to do it. Of course, if it is decided that Mrs. Brown, instead of having about seventy shares in the reserve has perhaps not more than half that number, she will have been all the time depriving the Natives of some of their interests in the reserve. That is the reason why a provision was put in the letter to her stating that on notice the rents would have to be repaid by Greenwood to the office. If they were paid to the office for some time before the termination of his lease the amounts due to the other Natives, in the event of her share being reduced, could be adjusted. As to her statement that I refused to take a sum of money for the survey—

*Heni te Rau (Mrs. Brown)*: I did not say that you refused. What you said was this: That I could make arrangements, and if we came to any terms at all you would have to affirm it, and that the Department would need to pay for the survey.

*Mr. Poynton*: I should be very pleased to have the office paid for the survey; it would relieve the office somewhat. If that was the impression, I was wrong, and shall be very pleased to have the survey fees paid by somebody else. The suggestion that the office wanted to make money out of the Natives by advancing the fees and charging interest on it, is nonsense. The office makes nothing out of lending, say £60, to Natives and getting it back in twenty years; that is nonsense. Regarding the statement of the petitioner that a lot of interlopers are in the grant, that has nothing whatever to do with the office. Sir William Fox, in recommending the issue of this grant or reserve, mentioned one Native with sixty-seven others. The placing of those others in the reserve had nothing whatever to do with us. The successors to these Natives are selected by the Land Court, and whether they were rightly put in at the start, or whether their successors have been wrongly put in since, we cannot define. They are all there, and each is entitled to his share.

*The Chairman*: Then, if you have an idea that there are any of these names illegally there, should not the Public Trustee make inquiries?

*Mr. Poynton*: No.

*The Chairman*: If it is proved that these men are illegally in that list, and you have been paying part of those rents illegally, do you not think it is the duty of the Public Trustee to inquire into it and remedy it?

*Mr. Poynton*: No. Any Native can come and ask for a division list and appeal against it. We preserve a neutral attitude towards the Natives. Sometimes we find it stated that a Native has wrongly put in a pedigree to the Court, then we interfere and put it right. What you mention, Mr. Chairman, is a matter for the Native Land Court.

*Heni te Rau (Mrs. Brown)*: I asked for that inquiry, but the Public Trustee objected on the ground that Mr. Poynton has just explained. That is why I appealed against the Court's decision. I pointed out to Mr. Fisher that there were a good many of the rebels in this grant who had no right to be there, but Mr. Fisher took the list and would not mention a word.

*Mr. Poynton*: The statement of the petitioner that this land belongs to her family only shows the extreme danger of letting Natives have control of this. It would mean interminable litigation amongst them. The better-educated amongst them would take advantage of the others.

*Heni te Rau (Mrs. Brown)*: That is no concern of the Public Trustee's.

*Mr. Poynton*: The statement of the petitioner that the Natives concerned managed their own lands better if the Public Trustee's control is removed, is easily disproved by any person looking at the Native reserves in Taranaki which are not under the control of the Public Trustee. There are a great many of these reserves in Taranaki. A number of them are alongside good roads, and a great many of them are exceptionally good land. Some of these are unoccupied, covered with furze and other weeds, and those that are occupied are not to be compared with those held under occupation license from the Public Trustee. The position of the Native lands in Taranaki which are not under the control of the Public Trustee is very discreditable to the Native owners. The office gets the blame very often for these reserves. When in Taranaki myself I was pointed out some very awful examples of the control of the office, but the reserves pointed out were not ours at all. The Natives do not look after their lands as well as they should. This particular reserve spoken of is not at all creditable to the owners. The reason for the Public Trustee interfering with it at all, or intimating to the Natives that the office would interfere, was owing to the disgraceful condition of this very reserve. The piece leased by the petitioner to Greenwood is a very choice piece, and, of course, it is well cultivated, fenced, and a credit to the lessee. The other part of the reserve, occupied by the Natives, does them no credit whatever. It is covered with gorse and is a pest to the neighbours. Weeds spread from it on to the holdings of the other settlers, who bitterly complain of its condition. The office has no desire whatever to interfere with this reserve. It is not too large for the Natives who are resident upon it, and if they will keep it free from weeds and prevent the complaints as to its condition the office will never interfere with it. If the Natives who are resident there desire particular portions for their individual occupation, the office will gladly assist them and do as it has done in other cases: give them occupation licenses. The majority of them, I might say, are strong Te-Whiti-ites, and on these grounds oppose the office, as they do all other Government institutions. When there last January I told those that were there that they must keep it clear of weeds, and if they would promise that, the office would not trouble them at all. I do not believe the petitioner's statement. She makes it honestly, I am sure, but says that the Natives are generally discontented with the control of the office. There are a few agitators that we hear from regularly—I do not want to mention their names—and the Te-Whiti-ites, who are